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BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HIGHWAYS, TRANSIT, AND PIPELINES
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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Chairman Petri and Members of the Subcommittee: I appreciate this opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee to testify on “Reauthorization of the Transportation Research, Development and Education programs” of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). NHTSA’s Administrator, Dr. Jeffery W. Runge, M.D., and my colleagues and I at NHTSA look forward to working closely with the Subcommittee and to receiving your support and ideas. NHTSA is committed to the Department’s goal of developing a reauthorization bill that is “safer, simpler, and smarter.”

I want to begin by giving you some data to set the safety context of our discussion. Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death and disability for Americans under age 35. These crashes cause 95 percent of deaths and 99 percent of injuries in U.S transportation each year. In 2001, our data show that 42,116 people lost their lives in highway crashes and more than three million people were injured. The impact of these deaths and serious injuries touch families and communities in ways that go far beyond these grim statistics.

The economic burden of traffic crashes on the Nation is staggering. Motor vehicle crashes cost

America \$231 billion annually, or 2.3 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product, including \$21 billion from Federal and State tax revenues (\$203 of tax for every household in the country). This figure includes approximately \$32 billion for medical expenditures and \$59 billion in property damage. Crash-related injuries are one of the leading causes of lost workdays for American industry. Financial costs pale in comparison to the ongoing pain, disability, psychological stress, and emotional strain experienced by victims of crash-related injury.

To combat these tragedies, Secretary Mineta has charged NHTSA and our sister modes, FHWA and FMCSA, to pursue an aggressive safety agenda to meet the Department's FY 2004 highway safety goal of reducing the fatality rate from 1.51 to no more than 1.38 fatalities per 100 million vehicles miles traveled (VMT). As FHWA pursues the mission through improvement in infrastructure, and FMCSA through heavy truck safety, NHTSA pursues its statutory mission to prevent deaths and injuries from motor vehicle crashes in two ways: (1) through programs to make vehicles safer, which fall under the jurisdiction of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce; and (2) through grant programs and innovative research, development, demonstration, and technical assistance programs targeted to help States and communities solve their unique highway safety problems, which fall under the jurisdiction of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and this Subcommittee.

OVERVIEW--SECTION 403 HIGHWAY SAFETY BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH

Congress designed NHTSA's highway safety behavioral research program, known by its United States Code citation as the Section 403 program, to support State highway safety programs and activities. It does this by developing and demonstrating innovative safety countermeasures, and by collecting and disseminating essential data on highway safety. The results of our Section 403 research

provide the scientific basis for highway safety programs that States and local communities can tailor to their own needs, ensuring that precious tax dollars are spent only on programs that are effective. The States are encouraged to use the successful programs for their ongoing safety programs and activities.

Highway safety behavioral research focuses on human factors that influence driver and pedestrian behavior and on environmental conditions affecting safety. The program addresses a wide range of safety problems: alcohol- and drugged-impaired driving, lack of use of safety belts and child safety seats, speeding, aggressive driving, fatigue and inattention. These all contribute significantly to the unacceptably high death, injury, and property damage costs on our highways.

NHTSA's data collection and analysis efforts are conducted through the agency's National Center for Statistics and Analysis. The Center is responsible for development and operation of a national program to collect, store, retrieve, disseminate, and analyze information on motor vehicle crashes and related matters. These efforts have produced a variety of useful results, including extensive data on how and where traffic fatalities and injuries are occurring on the Nation's roads, information on alcohol use in crashes, and strategies that can be used to encourage citizens to operate their vehicles safely and take actions to protect themselves in the event of a crash, such as using safety belts.

In brief, NHTSA's Section 403 program determines the causes of crashes, identifies target populations, acquires the research for developing countermeasures, and evaluates the effectiveness of programs that will reduce traffic deaths, injuries, and associated monetary costs.

FY 2004 SECTION 403 BUDGET REQUEST

I would like to give you some key details about our FY 2004 budget request for the Section 403 program. NHTSA's budget request for this program is critical to our mission to address the

Nation's public health problem of traffic crashes, death, and injury. Overall, we are building on the success of TEA-21 and requesting \$88,452,000 for the program. This is an increase of almost 23 percent over the \$72,000,000 authorized for Section 403 for each of fiscal years 1998-2003, and will enable our agency to make progress in our priority areas.

Our behavioral safety initiatives will be largely focused on increasing safety belt use and deterring impaired driving, which are the two most urgent requirements to reduce death and injury. Past research carried out under ISTEA and TEA-21 has provided the basis for innovative intervention strategies for use nationwide. We intend to focus on special populations most at risk to determine countermeasures appropriate for them. In addition, our program evaluations will examine methods for integrating high-visibility traffic law enforcement into the daily routine of State and community enforcement agencies.

Although safety belts save over 12,000 lives each year, nearly two-thirds (60 percent) of the passenger vehicle occupants killed in 2001 were unrestrained. From 1998 until 2002, the Nation's average belt use rate increased from 69 percent to 75 percent. Our goal is to reach 78 percent usage by the end of 2003 and 79 percent by the end of 2004.

Our research shows that those not using safety belts will respond to sound laws and enforcement. Primary usage laws are the key to attaining this goal. States with these laws achieved over 80 percent usage in 2002, compared to a 69 percent average in secondary law States. Moreover, in States with primary laws, as usage increases, the need for citations decreases, and law enforcement can apply their energies elsewhere. In FY 2004, NHTSA will continue to encourage adoption and enforcement of primary laws.

Alcohol is involved in 41 percent of the Nation's highway fatalities, resulting in over 17,400 deaths in 2001. In FY 2004, NHTSA will continue to support .08 BAC as the State standard for impaired driving, and enhance public knowledge about the danger of impaired driving. In States passing .08 laws, Section 403 program research has shown a benefit of about 7 percent in alcohol fatality reduction. Our goal is to reduce the rate of alcohol-related fatalities from the current 0.63 deaths per 100 million VMT to no more than 0.53 deaths per 100 million VMT by the end of 2004.

I also want to note that NHTSA is providing a lead role in the Department-wide Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) program's Intelligent Vehicle Initiative. Through this effort, which is administered by FHWA's ITS Joint Program Office, NHTSA is working closely with the vehicle manufacturers to advance the availability of crash avoidance technologies on vehicles. These technologies are designed to assist drivers under hazardous situations and to help them avoid impending crashes.

NHTSA also is engaged in other joint efforts with our sister modes. Especially noteworthy are our cooperative efforts with FHWA's safety office in the areas of speed, pedestrian safety, and crash data systems, and with FMCSA's Commercial Vehicle Analysis Reporting System (CVARS) and its commercial vehicle safety enforcement program.

Additional highlights of NHTSA's Section 403 program for FY 2004 are as follows:

- *Impaired Driving Program*—Provide national leadership and support for two intense national enforcement mobilizations, with best practice demonstrations, legislative analyses and tracking, law enforcement training, guidance for prosecutorial and judicial services, and Drug Recognition Expert data demonstrations. Expand outreach utilizing the social marketing approach to influence high-risk populations.
- *Occupant Protection Program*—Maintain national focus on biannual enforcement

mobilizations, evaluating targeted youth enforcement and education strategies, and developing approaches for reaching high-risk groups and environments such as diverse populations and nighttime drivers. Continue to implement the TREAD booster seat education campaign and develop methods for continuing gains in child safety seat use.

- *Pedestrian, Bicycle and Motorcycle Safety*—Develop high visibility, community-based, pedestrian safety initiatives; implement innovative law enforcement strategies; and leverage pedestrian safety with livability initiatives. Collaborate with national partners on motorcycle and bicycle safety policy and programs.
- *Enforcement and Justice Services*—Focus investments in new technologies, demonstrate programs, and provide technical assistance and education in working with criminal justice partners and licensing authorities on traffic safety issues, particularly impaired driving, occupant protection, and speed management.
- *Emergency Medical services (EMS)*—Continue to provide technical assistance to States and national organizations to implement the outcomes from the *National EMS Agenda*, including EMS education, trauma systems, wireless E9-1-1 in cooperation with FHWA, research, data, and performance measurement. This effort will continue NHTSA's leadership role in the EMS field in coordinating wireless emergency access and response activities among the Federal agencies, and developing protocols, operational guidance and education to assist State and local EMS systems. These types of enhancements will address NHTSA's mandate to reduce post-crash fatalities by enhancing a more rapid response and treatment of crash victims.
- *Highway Safety Research*—Focus on impaired driving and occupant protection and continue efforts to reduce crashes by young drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorcyclists.
- *Traffic Records, Driver Licensing & Driver Education*—Improve timeliness, accuracy, completeness, and accessibility of State Transportation Safety Information System data and advance standardized driver licensing procedures and testing, including enhanced uniform identification practices.
- *National Driver Register (NDR)*—Increase capacity and improve efficiency of the national data base to assist State in processing individual drivers licenses by identifying drivers whose licenses are denied, suspended, or revoked for serious traffic offenses. Test improved technology and begin research into a nationwide all-driver licensing system to reduce traffic deaths and injuries.
- *Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS)*—Collect national highway fatality data

that are vital to NHTSA's ability to identify life-threatening problems on the Nation's highways. Provide the essential metrics for determining the real-world effectiveness of countermeasures aimed at reducing deaths.

- *National Automotive Sampling System (NASS)*—Provide data critical to government and commercial researchers in developing and monitoring motor vehicle safety systems that save thousands of lives each year.
- *Data Analysis Program*—Conduct essential analytical projects, provide responses to over 20,000 requests from the public at large, and generate metrics that enable NHTSA to track its progress toward meeting national goals.
- *State Data Program*—Provide essential crash information not available from other data collection programs, filling an important gap by permitting the agency to further understand crash outcome information, and discover medical/financial data of victims.
- *Special Crash Investigations (SCI)*—Identify and document the effects of rapidly changing vehicle technologies to assess their impacts on real-world motor vehicle crashes. Evaluate newly introduced advanced occupant systems and their effect on occupants in real-world crashes.
- *International Cooperative Safety Activities*—Participate and cooperate in international activities to enhance highway safety by exchanging safety information; conducting safety research; and examining safety needs, best practices, and new technology.
- *Motor Vehicle Crash Causation Survey (MVCCS)*—Collect up-to-date, real-world, crash causation data to identify and understand motor vehicle crash factors that are integral to developing and evaluating crash-preventing countermeasures. This new survey will update 25-year-old data to identify and understand events that lead to motor vehicle crashes. This knowledge is vital to the development and evaluation of crash prevention countermeasures.

This concludes my testimony. I would be pleased to answer any questions.

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